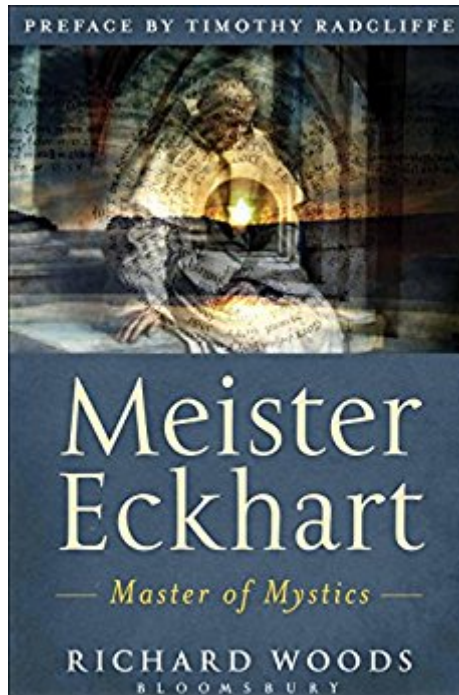


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Meister Eckhart: Master Of Mystics



Synopsis

Timothy Radcliffe introduces this masterly short guide to Eckhart's mystical teaching - perfectly pitched for those interested in spirituality and theology.~f~ ~ Richard Woods writes as a passionate advocate of Eckhart's relevance to issues and challenges facing intelligent people today with emphasis on religious understanding, belief, action and human suffering.~f~ ~ The fruit of more than ten years of reflection, Meister Eckhart: Master of Mystics explores a set of related themes bridging Eckhart's medieval world and our own turbulent times - women's role in spirituality and church life, global climate change and the sacredness of Creation, the meaning of detachment, the blind alleys of spiritual 'technology', the meaning of contemplation and the place of prayer, Eckhart's views on art and spirituality, his daring insights into the challenges of pain and suffering, and Eckhart's relevance for wider and deeper encounter among world religions. Other chapters investigate Eckhart's wide-ranging sources and his revolutionary approach to the redeeming mission of Jesus Christ.

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Customer Reviews

Well written by someone who understands the problem. Eye opening and positive with respect toward Meister Eckhart!

Helpful

The great medieval German spiritual leader, philosopher, and theologian Eckhart von Hocheim, (1260 -- 1328) has become a source of inspiration and teaching for individuals of every religious persuasion and for some secularists as well. Eckhart received the honorific academic title of "Meister" by which he remains known today in 1302 in recognition of his rare theological scholarship and learning. The Meister's teachings have become ecumenical in character, not limited by their time or by their church. Eckhart's complex teachings are ecumenical in another sense. In the breadth of his learning, including classical, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian sources, Eckhart was ecumenical in the sources on which he drew. Thus it is appropriate that the concluding chapter of Richard Woods' recent book, "Meister Eckhart: Master of Mystics" (2011) describes Eckhart's teachings as exemplifying a "wider ecumenicism" of interest to religious seekers and to those concerned with interfaith harmony. The book was written in celebration of the 750th anniversary of the Meister's birth. Woods, OP, is currently Professor of Theology at Dominican University, Illinois. He is the past chairman of the Eckhart Society, an international scholarly organization devoted to the study of Eckhart's thought. Woods has written an earlier, introductory study of Eckhart, "Eckhart's Way". Woods' new book is in fact a collection of twelve earlier essays written over a ten year period and revised for this volume. The book reads cohesively, however, with the individual essays arranged to almost constitute chapters in a single, unified work. There is a degree of repetition among the essays, particularly in the many quotations, which is not a bad thing in a thinker as complex as Eckhart. Woods draws primarily on Eckhart's sermons and treatises, which were written in an early German, but he also makes use of the Meister's scholastic commentaries, written in Latin. Eckhart's German writings have recently been reissued in a single volume edition translated by Maurice Walshe. Â Â The Complete Mystical Works of Meister EckhartÂ Â Walshe's translation is invaluable to serious students of Eckhart, and Woods uses it throughout his study. Woods' twelve essays are short but dense and provide an overview of Eckhart's teachings. While emphasizing the ecumenical character of Eckhart, Woods clearly sees him as falling within the broadest teachings of Catholicism. The opening essay, "A Mystic under Fire" is a short biography of Eckhart which focuses on the Papal condemnation of some of his teachings in 1328, after Eckhart had died. Woods, in company with many other Catholic scholars, believes the

condemnation was unjustified. Two of Woods' essays, together with the concluding essay are primarily devoted to the sources of Eckhart's teachings. I found these essays the most interesting in the book. In an essay called "The Thinker's Way to God", Woods closely examines Neoplatonic influences on Eckhart, in a tradition extending from Plato and Plotinus to the Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria, through earlier Christian thinkers. In the essay "Meister Eckhart and the Women Mystics of the Middle Ages" Woods compares and contrasts Eckhart's thought with earlier beguines and nuns. Eckhart has always been closely connected with women as his sermons were delivered to and recorded by congregations of women religious. The remaining essays examine various aspects of Eckhart's teaching. In an essay titled "On Creation: Did Eckhart love the World" Woods examines a problem basic to Eckhart and to neoplatonism: reconciling one's overriding commitment to an unknowable nonmaterial God with concern for the things and people in a perishable world. Woods' treatment of this question may be topheavy in its consideration of the modern environmental movement, but the subject is important in understanding Eckhart. The three central essays in the book (chapters 6-8) examine in various ways Eckhart's teachings on detachment, contemplation, and on what Eckhart, in his love for paradoxical language, called the "wayless way". These chapters present the heart of the Meister's teachings. These essays are followed by a short study of Eckhart's attitude towards prayer and a study of images in Eckhart or, to use another paradoxical expression "imageless images." A lengthy essay called "Eckhart, Suffering and Healing" examines Eckhart's teachings about understanding physical pain, using primarily Eckhart's late treatise "The Book of Divine Comfort" included in the Walshe volume. Only one of the essays, "I am the Son of God" is on a specifically Catholic theme, as Woods examines Eckhart's and Aquinas' contrasting understandings of the Incarnation. As I mentioned, Woods frequently repeats the same Eckhart quotations in several different essays. Here is a quote from Eckhart's sermon 5b (Walshe) that is discussed in several essays. It is difficult but important and offers an entry point to Woods' book. "Indeed, if a man thinks he will get more of God by meditation, by devotion, by ecstasies or by special infusion of grace than by the fireside or in the stable that is nothing but taking God, wrapping a cloak around His head and shoving Him under a bench. For whoever seeks God in a special way gets the way and misses God, who lies hidden in it. But whoever seeks God without any special way gets Him as He is in himself, and that man lives with the Son, and he is life itself." I came to Woods' book, and to think about Eckhart again, after reading two books on Enlightenment thought which seemingly would be far removed from Eckhart. — Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790; A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age — I am not sure just what Spinoza would have made of Eckhart.

The two thinkers have in common a belief in a single substance metaphysics as opposed to a metaphysical dualism. I am also uncertain about how I reconcile my interest in these two thinkers. Many people with secular orientations still may draw inspiration from the ecumenical spiritual teachings of Meister Eckhart. Robin Friedman

In this selection of essays on aspects of Meister Eckhart's spirituality, Eckhart scholar and Dominican priest Richard Woods provides an updated exploration of the great German mystic's spirituality that can be seen as a continuation of Wood's earlier 1989 book on the same theme. Selected topics include Eckhart and the Creation, Eckhart and female mysticism, Eckhart and Aquinas on the Incarnation, and the social and political context of his thought. In summary this is a valuable addition to Eckhart studies and a welcome insight into the mystic's thought.

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